These City People

These City People . . .

THREE out of four Americans are city people. One-half live in cities, communities of 10,000 or over. Another quarter live close enough to cities so their lives are urban in nature. As America increasingly becomes an urban nation, the problems of these city people are increasingly the problems of all America. As God's agency to bring redemption to man the Church must concern itself effectively with these problems.

Right after the American Revolution, about one hundred and fifty years ago, only one out of every twenty Americans lived in a city. Fifty years ago, one-third of Americans lived in cities. Now a large majority are city people. And the trend continues. Each year an acreage equal to that of Rhode Island is taken over for urban use!

. . . are lonely

THESE city people are lonely. America was once a neighborly nation. In the small and more leisurely communities, it is natural to know your neighbor, to understand him, to take an interest in him, and to share with him the joys and crises of life. Neighborliness brings about a sharing of concerns. Now that less people live in small communities, less people are having neighborly concerns for each other. Surveys show that people want the Church to help them find deeper and enriched relationships. Folks want someone with whom they can be folks. That presents a great opportunity for parish life in the city but

parishes will need help to become "that holy fellowship" for city people.

Some of these city people feel hopeless and helpless. No wonder Americans spend so much money for horoscopes; perhaps even the stars will help! Modern mass movements which threaten the freedom of our time, communism, fascism, nazism, had their start among city people. The parish church offers people an alternative, the opportunity to do something constructive not only about their own problems but about the whole wide world. The missionary emphasis of the Church both at home and abroad is an opportunity for every man, woman, and child to be part of God's program, the Kingdom of God. The Church's missionary work is the real answer to man's frustration for it gives him something immediate, practical, and inspired to do about social, economic, and political affairs.

. . . are restless

Many of these city people tend to become rootless and restless. They do not stay long enough in one place to put down the stabilizing roots which are essential to a sense of security. How these city people move about! In a recent year, one out of every six moved. In cities of 25,000 to 50,000, one out of three moved in the same period. This moving about creates difficulties for the parishes.

The Episcopal Church is a nurturing Church. It pre-supposes a long membership in one parish. Yet in some city parishes, half of the membership moves in a single year. Such people hardly have time to know more than a few persons in a

parish before they move away. The Church must quicken its pace. It must proclaim its truth more speedily and effectively. To learn how to do this is one of the purposes of a Five-Year Experimentation Program by the National Council's Division of Urban Industrial Church Work.

. . . tend to become rebellious

THESE city people live under a multitude of rules. There are stop lights, one way streets, subways, building codes, Keep Off the Grass signs, and sanitary regulations. Constantly confronted by these controls, these city people tend to become rebellious. Their rebellion is seen spectacularly in their children's patterns of misbehavior, sometimes called juvenile delinquency or teenage deviations. Whatever the name, an answer is desperately needed. The Episcopal Church has greatly strengthened its program of Christian education. A new curriculum is being produced. There is a national program of adult leadership training. The redemptive life of the Christian fellowship is the answer for the distracted life of our people, for it is in the Christian fellowship that we work out in practice the truth that in His service is perfect freedom.

. . . present opportunities

BUT the growth of cities brings opportunities as well as problems. There is the opportunity of the Church to strengthen sound family life, for city families are on the increase. In 1950 there were more than five million children less than five years of age in cities. The birth rate in

cities is now greater than in rural areas and continues to increase. As one response to this need, the Birthday Thank Offering for 1955-57 has been designated for Our New Neighbor's Children. The funds thus provided will train leaders for work among children in the cities.

Cities also are the seats of governmental power; centers in which the freedom of the spirit and of the intellect has flourished. Confronted by the growth of cities, the Old Testament prophets saw in the cities not only aggregations of evil, but possibilities for good. The New Testament tells how the Church was founded in the cities. Most of the *Epistles* are letters to city churches. The Bible closes with a vision of a Holy City, a New Jerusalem. The Christian Church is not discouraged about the growth of the city but encouraged by the vision of every city as a City of God. How can we be practical about this dream in the face of gangsterism, political corruption, narcotic addiction, class and racial bitterness, slums, vandalism, and crime?

. . . the new missionary frontier

First of all, churches must stop running away from the cities. Since World War I the city has become the graveyard of many a parish. That must be stopped. The Episcopal Church, in its General Convention of 1953, began a program of Urban Industrial Church Work. This is more than a matter of stopping a retreat, more than techniques to keep the Church alive, and more than stunts to fill the pews. It is a missionary advance. *The American City is the New Missionary Frontier.* Church work on that frontier

must be a strategic spiritual offensive. Sentimentality and planlessness must have no place in this struggle for the soul of the city.

The National Council's Division of Urban Industrial Church Work is conducting conferences all over the country for clergy and laity of city churches. Conferences in themselves do not solve the problem but are a safeguard against untested ideas.

Every city parish should study its city. It must know its city so that its ministry will be effective. Some parishes have already set to work on such studies. Other parishes have begun to examine realistically their own program in the light of the problems of their towns. One of the very great contributions you can make to effective church work in the city is to work for and welcome strategically planned changes in parish program.

Yet to know the facts and to welcome changes in program are not enough. You can also help your fellow parishioners to welcome warmly all sorts and conditions of people into your parish. Many city people think the Church does not want them. You and your friends can show in many effective ways that the Church welcomes everyone. To do that you must claim from God a genuine caring and concern for these city people. That is the first and most vital step in Christianizing the city. *We must Christianize the cities or the cities will paganize America.*

episcopal church

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